

METROPOLITAN TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION TRANSPORTATION 2035

GENERAL FOCUS GROUP: PARTICIPANTS RECRUITED FROM RANDOM PHONE POLL

MAY 22, 2008

SAN FRANCISCO COUNTY

Planning for future transportation needs: All but one of the San Francisco County focus group participants indicated that they mainly rely on public transit for their transportation needs. Interestingly, much of the discussion was spent on problems with current public transportation and the improvements that are needed in the future. It became clear that the participants rely on public transportation for a variety of reasons, but mainly because they “do not have any other choice.” Traffic congestion and the cost of parking make driving prohibitive to many residents of San Francisco. In this sense, the San Francisco County participants were similar to many of the participants of focus groups in other counties, in that they feel their transportation choices have been made for them by their place of residence and work.

The San Francisco County participants agreed that maintenance is needed throughout their community, including maintenance of city streets and highways, as well as public transportation systems. Further, a majority of the participants prioritized investments in maintenance of the existing system of roads, and the existing bus, rail and ferry services in the region. Contrary to several other focus groups, this maintenance centered on upkeep of public transportation systems. The remaining three participants prioritized investments in building new roads and adding more public transportation.

Maintain the existing system of roads, and the existing bus, rail and ferry services in the region.	7
Build new roads and add more bus, rail and ferry services in the region.	3

The responses to the question on the allocation of the \$30 billion dollar budget reflect a more moderate approach to maintenance than the above discussion. Although 2 participants indicated that they would spend up to 75 percent on maintenance, 8 participants indicated that they would spend up to 50 percent.

up to 25% (\$7.5 billion dollars)	0
up to 50% (\$15 billion dollars)	8
up to 75% (\$22.5 billion dollars)	2
100% (\$30 billion dollars)	0

With the funds that remain from the \$30 billion dollar budget, the participants reported that they would invest in the following: expanding public transportation systems (6) and extending BART throughout the Bay area (2); reducing transit fares (1); creating additional bike lanes (2); adding

traffic circles (1) and “smart traffic lights” (1); increasing access to information on bus schedules (1); and unspecified projects to “change our current transit structure (1).

Congestion relief: Overall, this group was the relatively most optimistic about traffic congestion in the future if funds are only spent on maintenance of existing systems – 1 participant reported that traffic congestion will be “Much better” and 2 participants reported that it will be “Somewhat better.” In comparison, seven participants reported that traffic congestion will be “Somewhat worse” (3) or “Much worse” (4).

Much better	1
Somewhat better	2
No change	0
Somewhat worse	3
Much worse	4

The participants unanimously indicated that investments in public transit options should take priority in plans to reduce traffic congestion. Interestingly, many of the participants did not consider expansion of public transportation systems to be the answer to congestion problems within San Francisco. Instead, these participants suggested that existing public transportation systems should be used more efficiently. There was a general consensus that existing systems could be used more efficiently to provide better service.

The discussion then turned to the need for additional public transit options for commuters. Several participants travel to the Peninsula for work, and they agreed that there are not enough options for taking public transportation. In fact, these participants reported that they generally prefer to drive for this travel, but rely on public transportation for travel within San Francisco.

The moderator then asked participants to name one thing they would like to see improved in local public transit, and the participants made the following comments: “safety, reliability, and a schedule that I can count on”; “need more heavy rail and light rail, more shuttles”; “reliability”; “more buses, more trains”; “need to expand and optimize, integrate with what we have”; “more convenient, more buses, more trains”; “convenient, run in areas that are more congested”; “more dependable”; “all use the same fare”; “space for more bikes and a place to put bags or luggage”; and “more express services, everything is fast, it should be faster than driving.”

Highway systems to relieve traffic congestion, including ramp metering, high-occupancy toll lanes, etc.	0
Public transit options, including rail and buses to provide alternatives to driving.	10
Walking paths and bicycle lanes to provide alternatives to driving	0

The participants viewed several of the options as possible means of managing truck volumes along freight corridors. In response to this question, participants mentioned multiple plans, so the responses in the below table sum to more than 10.

Keep trucks out of the peak commuter hours	5
Allow smaller trucks to use carpool lanes during congested periods for a fee	0

Encourage more cargo deliveries be made by rail or ferries	0
Build exclusive truck lanes supported by trucking fees	5
Provide more truck parking in commercial business areas	0

Providing transit access: The participants were divided in their opinions of the affordability of transit fares. Some participants argued that fares are affordable, and there is no need to reduce the cost for the average Bay area resident. Other participants discussed free transit systems in other states and countries, and they argued that a similar system would increase transit use in the Bay area.

Although the participants supported discounted transit fares for students, seniors, and riders with physical disabilities, they were uncertain that a program based on household income could be effectively administered. One participant suggested that residents should have the option of submitting their transit tickets with their tax returns to receive credit, and this idea was accepted by a majority of the group.

Emissions reduction: Similar to the discussion on traffic congestion, an overwhelming majority of the participants indicated that reducing tailpipe emissions and encouraging alternatives to driving should take priority in emission reduction plans. One participant was undecided on the issue and did not offer an opinion.

Reducing tailpipe emissions and encouraging alternatives to driving, such as public transit, bicycling, walking, etc.	9
Reducing traffic congestion and improving traffic flow to make it easier to drive around the Bay area	0

The participants suggested a variety of transportation programs to reduce automobile emissions. These suggestions included the following: clean-air buses and rails; subsidy programs for the purchase of fuel-efficient or alternative-fuel cars; more stringent smog standards for older cars; buy-back programs for old cars; toll roads to make driving a more expensive alternative; additional bike lanes; car and bike share programs; education programs to encourage the use of public transportation; room for bikes on buses and rail; and better traffic controls and traffic management programs.

Final thoughts on maintenance versus expansion projects: Following the discussion, one participant indicated that he would spend less on maintenance, and one participant indicated that she would spend more than the amount indicated at the beginning of the evening. Although the participants were well aware of the consequences of deferred maintenance, they commented that additional projects are also important to meet future transportation needs.

up to 25 % (\$7.5 billion dollars)	1
up to 50 % (\$15 billion dollars)	6
up to 75 % (\$22.5 billion dollars)	3
100 % (\$30 billion dollars)	0

In addition to maintenance, the participants indicated the following projects as priorities for funding: reducing transit fares for all Bay area residents (3); providing transportation funds to cities that develop new housing near transit (1); expanding (4) and optimizing (1) public transportation systems; and funding programs to relieve traffic congestion (3) and automobile emissions (2).